

NICK DAMETTO
Member for Hinchinbrook



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Labor misses mark in crime petition response

THE State Labor Government has failed to reassure North Queenslanders how it will keep them safe after thousands signed two parliamentary petitions demanding tougher penalties for criminals.

Started by Take Back Townsville co-ordinator and Katter's Australian Party's candidate for Thuringowa Julianne Wood, the parliamentary e-petition and paper petition called on the House to "make significant legislative changes to introduce tougher penalties for offenders, including juveniles, so that law-abiding citizens can live in peace".

Sponsored by Hinchinbrook MP Nick Dametto, the e-petition attracted the support of 7732 people before closing on April 27 and added to a paper petition on the same topic tabled earlier this year which got 3042 signatures.

Mr Dametto said the response to the paper petition by Acting Attorney-General Stirling Hinchliffe "did not address the crux of the problem".

"The Acting Attorney-General's response to the paper petition, while comprehensive, largely relies on highlighting the work of existing government programs, initiatives and support organisations that deal with crime and sentencing. Given anecdotal evidence, the effectiveness of these measures is highly questionable," Mr Dametto said.

"It is obvious to anyone living in the North that the government's existing measures have not been effective in countering crime and bringing it down to levels considered acceptable by the community."

Mr Dametto took issue with existing penalties in place for criminal offences.

"I note that in his response, the Minister highlights examples of offences that carry significant maximum penalties from seven years to life imprisonment. What the Minister fails to address is the growing community frustration of some judges to be far too lenient in their sentencing of both juveniles and adult criminals. This is why mandatory minimum sentencing, such as unlawful use of a motor vehicle, should be strongly considered as a safeguard against overly lenient sentencing not in line with community expectations and acts as a deterrent," he said.

"The Minister also tries to downplay the proportion of crime committed by juveniles (10 to 17-year-olds) in Townsville during 2018-19 at only 1.6 per cent, yet conveniently ignores the widespread impact that this age demographic has had on residents. 10 per cent of these young offenders are

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committing 44 per cent of youth crime, and in some areas, nearly 50 per cent. Since becoming the Member for Hinchinbrook, my office has been inundated with calls from hundreds of victims of youth crime, angry that these repeat offenders continue to be let back out into society. The message I've received is clear – existing deterrents and programs are not working."

Mr Dametto said it was "still too early to know" if Labor's newly announced "On Country" culture-based rehabilitation program for young indigenous offenders, bail laws or \$2 million for community-based solutions to crime would work.

"These initiatives seem to be just fiddling around the edges," he said.

"Ultimately, what is required is a substantive legislative change that sets acceptable sentencing baselines for young and adult criminals, coupled with Katter's Australian Party's relocation sentencing policy which would send juvenile offenders to a remote property west of Mt Isa where they will get on country, learn life skills on the land and at the same time, reform.

"We also need to reintroduce breach of bail as an offence for youth offenders. Although this is not a silver bullet, it will go a long way to tidying up some of this legislation.

Ms Wood said she was disappointed the Minister had refused to address breach of bail.

"We wanted them to look at breach of bail and toughening up Section 48 of the Youth Justice Act but the Minister has refused to even consider it in his response," she said.

"I further note that the Minister touts the 24/7 Police Strike Team involving youth justice workers for high risk offenders under Labor's so-called 'five point action plan'. A recent report in the *Townsville Bulletin* indicates this has already been watered down to three or four shifts a week which tells you Labor is not even serious about addressing the youth crime crisis plaguing Townsville.

"The community will not be taken for fools and they will remember Labor's contempt for them come election time. Katter's Australian Party stands with the thousands of law-abiding citizens who signed both the paper and e-petitions in demanding this government take real action on crime."

—ENDS—

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Photo caption

Hinchinbrook MP Nick Dametto says thousands of residents have made their voice heard in two recent parliamentary petitions on North Queensland's crime crisis.

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